

VZCZCXRO8204
RR RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLS #0985/01 3641404
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 301404Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7534
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP 0198
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LUSAKA 000985

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KPAO](#) [ZA](#)
SUBJECT: VICE PRESIDENT'S CHRISTMAS "CRACKER" FIZZLES

REF: LUSAKA 951

LUSAKA 00000985 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Michael Koplovsky for reasons 1.
4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Progress by journalists and the Zambian government (GRZ) on media self-regulation appeared endangered December 22 when Vice President George Kunda sent the Ministry of Information (MOI) his own draconian media bill, based in part on Zimbabwe's media regulations. Kunda's strident approach took media associations by surprise in light of Information Minister Shikapwasha's recent, more conciliatory gestures. After publicly denying the vice president's involvement, the MOI privately indicated that Kunda faces GRZ pressure to abandon his bill. Kunda may have interjected himself into the issue in reaction to a fresh round of critical press. However, he has been the government's go-to man for delivering bad news of late, a role he could be reprising. Media contacts are trying to remain hopeful that continuing dialogue with the MOI will yield a more constructive outcome. End summary.

¶2. (C) The MOI called in Press Association of Zambia (PAZA) Vice President Amos Chanda December 22 to read a new GRZ draft of proposed statutory media regulation. Chanda told EmbOff that Ministry employees informed him Vice President and Minister of Justice George Kunda, unhappy with the GRZ's original draft, had sent MOI a personally revised version. Kunda's version of the media bill includes insertions from Ugandan media regulation and the Zimbabwean Media Act. A new 15-member media council -- appointed by the MOI and largely comprising non-journalists -- would have the power to fine or recommend three years imprisonment for journalists operating contrary to regulations. The Minister would be empowered to change the media regulations at any time, in "consultation" with the council. The bill requires licenses for practicing journalists and defines -- and therefore restricts -- who can be a "journalist." The council, however, is empowered to bestow the moniker on others as it sees fit. As in Zimbabwe, a separate Zambia Institute of Journalists would act as a "policy advisory group" for the GRZ. Media organizations would be required to register all editors with both bodies.

¶3. (C) Media bodies were caught off-guard by Kunda's version of the bill. Kunda's confrontational stance on media regulation is at odds with Shikapwasha's more moderate tone and cooperative approach on the issue. In a December 10 meeting with the Ambassador (reftel), Shikapwasha said the GRZ's six-month ultimatum to media to regulate themselves was intended to spur serious progress toward a professional code of conduct. (Note: Charge has requested a meeting with Kunda, a request the VP has thus far successfully dodged. End note.) Shikapwasha told the press December 17 that the GRZ would extend the deadline to allow media more time to finalize their own self-regulation plan. He joined the Ambassador December 14 at the opening of a USG-funded PAZA workshop

focused on media self-regulation. Following the workshop, Shikapwasha and Chanda continued the dialogue on media regulation and reviewed the GRZ's original draft plan for regulation. In a December 23 meeting, Shikapwasha reportedly reassured journalists that the ultimatum deadline would not be an issue. He added that if the media's self-regulation proposal were modeled on South Africa's, the GRZ would unlikely introduce its own version.

14. (C) On December 28, Shikapwasha publicly disavowed Kunda's intervention and claimed authorship of the revised bill came solely from within the MOI. However, the following day, Shikapwasha called Chanda with a private reversal: Kunda was under pressure from within the GRZ to back down on "his" bill. The MOI said if the Media Liaison Committee pulled an ad campaign launched December 28 in the private print media decrying Kunda's "cold hand of censorship," Kunda would abandon his bill, meet with media bodies, and support adoption of the media's self-regulation plan, now scheduled to be finalized in February. Journalists at PAZA's December 30 year-in-review press conference expressed cautious optimism that self-regulation would come to fruition.

15. (C) Comment: The thin-skinned Banda administration frequently lashes out in the wake of criticism by the independent press. Kunda has been singled out recently, and the revised bill may simply have been a knee-jerk reaction to the negative press. On the other hand, Kunda has been the government's go-to man for delivering bad news lately - including the implementation of a restrictive NGO bill and accusing diplomats of interference in domestic matters. It may be giving the vice president too much credit, but his unexpected and risky parry appears to have lit a fire under PAZA to complete its self-regulation proposal. President Banda has thus far been silent on the issue. Shikapwasha's

LUSAKA 00000985 002.2 OF 002

private comments on December 29 indicate Kunda's capitulation and have renewed journalists' hopes for a positive conclusion to the media regulation saga.
KOPLOVSKY